At the Princess's Theatre

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THE CHARLES KEANS

1856

The Charles Keans, from whom I received my first engagement, were both remarkable people, and at the Princess's Theatre were doing very remarkable work. Kean the younger had not the fire and genius of his wonderful father, Edmund, and but for the inherited splendour of his name it is not likely that he would ever have attained great eminence as an actor. His Wolsey and his Richard (the Second, not the Third) were his best parts, perhaps because in them his beautiful diction had full scope and his limitations were not noticeable. But it is more as a stage reformer than as an actor that he will be remembered. The old happy-go-lucky way of staging plays, with its sublime indifference to correctness of detail and its utter disregard of archaeology, had received its first blow from Kemble and Macready, but Charles Kean gave it much harder knocks and went further than either of them in the good work.

It is an old story and a true one that when Edmund Kean made his first great success as Shylock, after a long and miserable struggle as a strolling player, he came home to his wife and said : " You shall ride in your carriage/[1] and then, catching up his little son, added, " and Charley shall go to Eton ! " Well, Charley did go to Eton, and if Eton did not make him a great actor, it opened his eyes to the absurd anachronisms in costumes and

accessories
which prevailed on the stage at that period, and when he
undertook the management of the Princess's Theatre, he
turned his classical education to account. In addition
to scholarly knowledge, he had a naturally refined taste
and the power of selecting the right men to help him.